

Meeting Notes:
Shillapoo Wildlife Area Advisory Group Meeting Held January 27, 2005.

Group members present: Wildlife Area Manager Calkins, Terry Cornelius, Al Fazio, Eric Anderson, Nancy Ellifrit, Don Lewis, Casey Gozart, Derik Vowels, Lee Salmon, Tom Collins, Ted Brown, Gene Teel, Jeroen Kok.

ITEM 1: Group members were asked to introduce themselves and explain their interest in the wildlife area.

ITEM 2: Calkins gave an overview of WDFW's purpose for wanting to have advisory groups for each wildlife area and the planning process that has started. The advisory group purpose was read directly from the planning manual and then clarified. Calkins also briefly explained the Shillapoo Wildlife Area is a part of Bonneville Power's (BPA) wildlife mitigation program and that there probably be two plans with the BPA plan going into greater detail. A number of questions were generated as to what level of detail the plan would cover including some about SEPA requirements.

ITEM 3: The drafts of the first two chapters of the WDFW plan version were briefly reviewed. The agency objectives and how they would be used in the plan was explained. The current budget amount provided by BPA was discussed. Several questions were addressed concerning what was included in the budget and how work was accomplished by employees verses using contractors for projects.

Chapter 2 was covered very briefly. Calkins explained that the entire meeting could be spent reviewing the historical information. Instead, the group was asked to review this information later and to contact Calkins if they found anything important to be missing or inaccurate.

ITEM 4: The Goals, Objectives and Tasks from the existing draft BPA plan were presented to the group. This was the primary purpose for the meeting and it took more time than anticipated. Generally the group felt that the goals were appropriate but provided comments that will generally strengthen them. For example one member of the group suggested that we should be more specific in identifying and including measurable criteria such as having less than 40% reed canary grass in moist soil management areas rather than stating "initiate moist soil management."

A new objective was desired under the second goal relating to weed management. This objective would be to increase surveillance for new weeds in addition to monitoring existing problems.

The group also supported a new goal that would focus on trying to provide better enforcement presence on the wildlife area. This conversation also identified a need in surrounding areas as well. The issues discussed were not necessarily hunting and fishing rules but included vandalism, dumping, street racing, etc.

During the review of the goals a number of side topics came up. One was a conflict between dog training activities and waterfowl hunters as well as “separating” birdwatchers and hunters. Another was a request for a needs and wants list for the wildlife area identifying items where help is needed to get a project done or a piece of equipment for operations. The need for expanded parking was also noted and is already at least partially captured in one of the existing goals.

ITEM 5: There were three specific issues from the regional wildlife staff that were presented to the group. Each one was an identified issue or conflict that the agency has been trying to resolve. These included trap shooting on the wildlife area, issues related to the Erwin O. Reiger Memorial Highway, general abuse of agency lands (particularly on the Vancouver Lake Unit). Interestingly, these three issues all seemed to blend into one conversation as they all posed similar problems. The overall theme of the discussion was that better public information and outreach, as well as upgrading facilities would attract better users whose presence would discourage those that would abuse the area.

Trap shooting has been permitted on the wildlife area for many years but is currently restricted to one location on the Vancouver Lake Unit and is allowed throughout the other two. The activity is closed seasonally during upland bird and waterfowl seasons. Calkins informed the group that discussions were ongoing within the agency to close the entire Vancouver Lake Unit to target practice but a need to provide an alternate site was recognized and that closing the portion of the South Unit along the Reiger highway to target shooting had also been discussed. Use of lead shot for trap shooting, which is prohibited throughout the wildlife area, has continued by some users and is also a concern.

The group’s comments on this issue could be summarized as supporting one location on the wildlife area for shotgun target practice with many desiring the location to be at the existing Vancouver Lake site. A location on the South Unit was discussed as a possible alternative but there would be some conflict with wintering waterfowl management and it would be closer to existing homes in the marina on Lower River Road. A North Unit location was generally ruled out as this area has the highest use by Sandhill Cranes. Maintaining the current seasonal closure was supported but there is an identified need to have an area that could be used year-round.

The Reiger Highway follows then dead ends on the eastern boundary of the Wildlife Area’s South Unit. Vancouver Clark Parks manages the lands on the opposite side of the roadway as an undeveloped portion of Vancouver Lake Park. The road can be considered somewhat remote even though it is only a few miles from downtown Vancouver. Parks operates a gate at the road’s southern point of origin to control access at night. Identified problems include off road driving into the parks property, target shooting including rifles, unlawful dumping, and drug use among others. The road is a popular access for fishers on the parks property, hunters accessing the wildlife area, and wildlife viewers, and hikers on both WDFW and Parks property. Parks and WDFW have been in disagreement as to where the road should be barricaded to control the abuse. Previously DOT had barricaded the road near the end of the pavement which was

WDFW's preference but parks would prefer to have the road blocked near where the road first reaches the wildlife area about one mile further south. Due to a recent accident involving the barricade WDOT has removed the barriers due to liability concerns. Calkins told the group that WDFW had discussed taking ownership and responsibility for the road with parks and DOT. This idea in its initial stages would theoretically alter the road changing it to a parking lot with altered traffic flow, speed bumps and barriers to discourage off-road driving.

A wide range of views was expressed as to how to control unlawful activities along the Highway. Several group members identified the road as a very accessible area for wildlife viewing and wanted it to remain accessible by vehicle. Others saw it as an important hunting access. The group did not reach any sort of a conclusion on this topic with some wanting to maintain vehicle access for wildlife viewing and others wanting to limit travel on the road to foot traffic. Those familiar with the problems did generally agree that things did improve after Vancouver Parks purchased the land on the east side of the road and barriers were placed across the end of the roadway. The idea of improving outreach and information to attract legitimate users was an important component of the discussion.

Abuses of agency lands occur here as with many other public sites. There are areas where problems are more prevalent on this wildlife area, notably at and around the access areas within the Vancouver Lake Unit. This portion is accessed by a dead end road, which is gated at night. Signs here frequently are shot at, torn down or defaced. Off-road abuse is a problem particularly in late summer when the lake level is low. Other unlawful acts include drug use and sale, possible prostitution, and illegal dumping.

Calkins introduced the idea of a group similar to the agencies "eyes in the woods" program where volunteers are trained to be better observers when they see a violation. This somewhat mirrored a "Friends of Shillapoo" idea that was put forth by one of the group members earlier in the meeting. The idea of providing better public outreach and information was related to this subject as well. Because this topic blended into the other two, which the group seemed more interested in, it merits further discussion at a future meeting.

The draft WAC concerning use of agency lands was distributed to the members but because the meeting had already extended one hour beyond the planned adjournment it was not discussed. The group was afforded the opportunity to contact Calkins with comments or questions.

ITEM 6: The group was given the opportunity to propose topics for future meetings in addition to those that were already listed on the agenda. The following topics will be included: Closed waterfowl days (i.e. not hunting every day of the season), hunting blinds (Should there be more?), Dog training, Canal crossings, Formal programs (Bird Fest, school trips, volunteer activities, kiosks). *The group requested an additional meeting prior to the scheduled June meeting to further discuss some of the goals and issues. Calkins agreed to facilitate this meeting sometime in March.*